

Pressure Increasing on Phan Rang

3. Phan Rang City was hit by scattered Communist long-range artillery fire on April 14. North Vietnamese tanks have been spotted 12 miles north of the city and these vehicles may be moving to join Communist infantry troops assembling for attacks on the western approaches to the city. All South Vietnamese units and commanders are reported to be reacting well to the situation and air strikes are being targeted against the Communist artillery positions.

4. General Toan, the Military Region 3 commander who now has the responsibility for both Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, is unhappy with Saigon's order to withdraw the 2nd Airborne Brigade from Phan Rang. Some senior regional officials have compared this decision to the withdrawal of the Airborne Division from MR-1 which led to the collapse of government forces there. Toan feels that without the airborne, Phan Rang cannot be held against the strong Communist attacks which now appear to be shaping up. The city's major importance to the government is the airbase from which air-strikes are being launched against Communist forces in Military Region 3.

Tay Ninh Shelled

5. Meanwhile, to the northwest of Saigon, the Communists on April 14 lobbed 50 or so rounds of rocket and artillery fire into Tay Ninh City damaging a hospital and destroying an ammunition bunker. Only one regiment of the South Vietnamese 25th Division remains in Tay Ninh City -- the remainder has been deployed into southern Tay Ninh Province in anticipation of a Communist effort to cut the roads linking Tay Ninh with Saigon.

Government Successes in the Delta

6. All of Route 4 is now open to traffic. Although many of the South Vietnamese forces around Can Tho have been primarily in a defensive posture, they have protected the populated areas and important roads and have inflicted heavy casualties

[Redacted]

on the enemy. This government success has raised the morale of all ranks in much of the region.

7. In addition to reopening Route 4 just north of Can Tho, seven South Vietnamese infantry and armor battalions swept into Communist-held areas of Vinh Long Province, driving enemy forces away from artillery positions used to shell Can Tho. Regional officials now feel the North Vietnamese 4th Division has lost much of its capability to threaten Can Tho City.

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8. It now appears that the government has won the opening round in the delta. Its units have not only stood and fought, withstood enemy attacks, but have also driven attacking Communist forces back from positions threatening populated areas and major highways.

Attacks on Saigon

9. Recent reporting continues to refer to Communist plans to carry out attacks inside Saigon in the near future. While the Communists clearly have the capability of infiltrating small units, such as sappers, into the capital area, there are as yet no indications of Communist main force units moving into position for direct attacks on Saigon itself.

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11. Most Communist units are now deployed along the southern, western, and eastern approaches to the capital. Moreover, in the fighting at Xuan Loc, government units so far have acquitted themselves well and inflicted heavy losses

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on the Communists.

The Political Situation

12. President Thieu formally accepted the new government of Nguyen Ba Can today in swearing-in ceremonies at the presidential palace. In his acceptance speech, Thieu told his audience that he fully intended to stay on as president and that he did not view his new ministers as comprising "a transitional government." He reiterated his earlier offer of negotiations with the Communists under the Paris Accords but emphasized that Saigon will never "ask for surrender."

13. He also included an appeal for additional US assistance, stating that so long as the South Vietnamese fight for their freedom, the US has "the obligation of a big ally to help us to the end." In a direct appeal to the US Congress, he said that only "a stable and strong South Vietnam" can compel the Communists to stop fighting and resume negotiations. Can's remarks essentially echoed those of Thieu's.

CAMBODIA

14. Reporting on the tactical situation around Phnom Penh remains confused. Despite denials by the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok -- which claims to be in direct contact with Phnom Penh -- some news agencies are still alleging that insurgent troops have entered the capital's outskirts.

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15. The US Embassy in Bangkok today received a telegram from two US correspondents who remained in Phnom Penh requesting that aircraft be dispatched to Pochentong to evacuate 500 orphans.

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